

Journal of Research Initiatives

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Article 2

Fall 11-17-2014

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Recommended Citation

Mitchell, Donald Jr.; Hardley, Jamillya; Jordan, Darius; and Couch, Michael (2014) "Journals in the Field of Higher Education: A Racial Analysis," *Journal of Research Initiatives*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 2.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/jri/vol1/iss2/2>

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Journals in the Field of Higher Education: A Racial Analysis

Keywords

field of higher education journal rankings, journal rankings, journal prestige, race, status of journals



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Donald Mitchell Jr., Jamillya Hardley, Darius Jordan, and Michael Couch

Abstract

Too often, scholarship regarding the concept of race in the United States is absent from top-tier journals across fields. Yet, at some institutions, faculty, including scholars who explore race, are required to publish in top-tier journals to secure tenure. This article highlights the extent to which journals—of all tiers—within the field of higher education publish articles explicitly highlighting race in the study. The authors used Bray and Major's (2011) article, "Status of Journals in the Field of Higher Education" as the data source for the sample. Using a systematic approach, the authors surveyed journals in the field of higher education to determine the percentage of studies that explicitly focused on race for each of the journals included, using a three-year timeframe. The authors found that individual journals they labeled as "top tier mentions" published 14-21% of articles on race. The remainder of the journals included in the study published anywhere from 0-7% of their articles on race. Implications for practice—particularly for tenure-track faculty who explore race—and future research are discussed.

Keywords: field of higher education journal rankings, journal rankings, journal prestige, race, status of journals

Introduction

The informal and formal ranking of journals in the field of higher education is not a new phenomenon (for examples, see Bayer, 1983; Hyle, Kearney, Hankins, & McGee-Denton, 2005; Wellington & Torgerson, 2005). To further the discourse of journal rankings within the field of higher education, Bray and Major (2011) published their innovative study, "Status of Journals in the Field of Higher Education," in the *Journal of Higher Education*. Through a survey distributed to higher education scholars across the United States, Bray and Major determined the status of journals within the field of higher education by asking survey participants to rank 51 publications included within the survey. Participants ranked each publication "1st tier," "2nd tier," "3rd tier," "4th tier," and "I don't know." Using modes as the determination for status (e.g., a journal receiving more 1st-tier rankings than 2nd-tier rankings would be considered 1st tier), they found that six journals or monographs were considered tier-1; 14 were considered tier-2; and 30 were considered tier-3 (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). One publication was considered tier-4 and was removed from the study.

Table 1

Tier-1 Journals in the Field of Higher Education

Journal of Higher Education
Review of Higher Education
Research in Higher Education
Journal of College Student Development
Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research
Higher Education

Note. Adapted from Bray and Major (2011).

While Bray and Major's (2011) study is helpful for the field generally, we questioned how their findings relate to subfields within higher education—more specifically, scholarship that explicitly highlighted race¹ in their explorations. Too often, scholarship explicitly highlighting the U.S. concept of race (i.e., Black, White, Latino/a, etc.) is missing from top-tier journals across all academic fields (Aguirre, 2000; Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008; Turner & Myers, 2000). Yet, faculty are sometime required to publish in top-tier journals to secure tenure (Bray & Major, 2011), including those faculty whose scholarship focuses on race. This article highlights the extent to which journals in the field of higher education—across all tiers—publish studies that explicitly focused on race, using Bray and Major's article as the source for the journals included.

Table 2

Tier-2 Journals in the Field of Higher Education

*New Directions for Higher Education
*New Directions for Institutional Research
Community College Review
*New Directions for Teaching and Learning
*New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education
Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education
College and University
Journal of College Student Retention
Journal on Excellence in College Teaching
Studies in Higher Education
Higher Education Policy
Higher Education Quarterly
Journal of General Education
Journal of College Counseling

Note. Adapted from Bray and Major (2011). *Journal removed from our analysis.

According to the National Science Foundation, racial and ethnic minority populations, collectively, will outnumber White people in the U.S. by the year 2025 (Malcom, Dowd, & Yu,

2010). Because of these racial and ethnic demographic shifts, the demographics within U.S. higher education contexts are also changing and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. As the racial and ethnic trends shift, colleges and universities are also adjusting recruitment, outreach, and retention efforts (Outten & Hilton, 2013). In addition, research and scholarship explicitly examining race is needed, and has, in fact, proliferated, albeit slowly. For example, in 2008, the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* was founded and publishes multiple studies that highlight race as part of the scholarly investigation (Worthington, 2012). While scholarship that highlights race has grown during the past 30 years, the presence of research and scholarship exploring race continues to warrant attention. Furthermore, not only are articles that focus on race important within the field of higher education, critical race analyses are often missing from the literature.

Table 3

Tier-3 Journals in the Field of Higher Education

**NASPA Journal
 *New Directions for Student Services
 *New Directions for Community Colleges
 College Student Affairs Journal
 Perspectives on the History of Higher Education
 College Teaching
 Community College Journal of Research and Practice
 Innovative Higher Education
 Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management
 NACADA Journal
 Continuing Higher Education
 Thought & Action
 Planning for Higher Education
 Journal of Faculty Development
 Journal of Continuing Higher Education
 International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education
 Journal of Computing in Higher Education
 Internet and Higher Education
 Higher Education Management and Policy
 Journal of College Orientation and Transition
 Journal of Applied Research in the Community College
 Journal of Marketing for Higher Education
 Quality in Higher Education
 Teaching in Higher Education
 Journal of Further and Higher Education
 Tertiary Education and Management
 Journal of College Teaching and Learning
 Journal of the Professoriate
 *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education
 *Research in Post-Compulsory Education

Note. Adapted from Bray and Major (2011). *Journal removed from our analysis. **Journal renamed *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*.

Bensimon and Bishop (2012) note that higher education scholars are not: well-schooled in asking critical questions that begin with an understanding of the racialized patterns in higher education structures, policies, and practices that reproduce these inequalities in access and success. Rather, many academics have learned to use theories and research methods that exclude race altogether, include it as a predictive demographic characteristic, or make sense of racial and ethnic minority groups by how well they measure up to Whites (p. 2).

Furthermore, Bensimon and Bishop wrote that when researchers do conduct research on race, they often are not researching race from a critical or knowledgeable lens because they ignore structural racism as a component of the study. Similarly, Harper (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of seven journals in the field of higher education to examine the ways in which racial analyses were conducted with and without using the word racism. Surveying 255 eligible articles over a 10-year span (i.e., 1999-2009), he found that only 55 of the papers that explored race included the word racism within the analysis, thus highlighting the need for scholars to critically examine race in their work. While we agree with Bensimon and Bishop's and Harper's analyses that critical race explorations are necessary, the scope of this particular study was narrow. We simply examined the volume of race-related studies published in journals in the field of higher education. The specific research question was, "How prevalent is race-related scholarship across higher education journals?"

Theoretical Framework

We approached the present study using a critical race theoretical framework. Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s when minority lawyers believed they were being overlooked in critical legal studies (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2002). The tenets of CRT include the following: (a) racism exists and is normal in the United States, (b) CRT challenges racial oppression and the status quo, (c) the interests of White people and People of Color must converge (known as interest convergence), and (d) CRT uses storytelling and counter narratives to explain the phenomena (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013). Treviño, Harris, and Wallace (2008) added that CRT "directs attention to the ways in which structural arrangements inhibit and disadvantage some more than others in our society" (p. 8). Given our analytical lens, we contend that race-related scholarship belongs in peer-reviewed journals—across all tiers—because racism exists, race matters, and to improve race relations within higher education context, studies that explicitly examine race are necessary.

Method

We originally intended to have a sample consisting of the tiered journals and monographs within the field of higher education highlighted in Bray and Major's 2011 study, which included 50 publications. Nevertheless, we reduced our sample to 42 journals in the field of higher

education because some of the journals/monographs are known for publishing thematic issues (e.g., *New Directions* monographs) or highlight race in all of their publications (e.g., *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*). Because we expect thematic issues and journals that focus on race-related scholarship to intentionally include and/or exclude articles on race, we removed these publications from the analysis.

We surveyed the 42 publications included in the study by reviewing each article published in each of the publications during a three-year period (i.e., 2010-2012); we utilized electronic retrieval sources (e.g., JSTOR, ProjectMUSE, EBSCOhost) or the journals' websites for open access journals. We used a three-year timeframe because some indices and databases use a three-year timeframe to calculate journal impact factors (e.g., SCImago Journal & Country Rank). We collected the data by examining archived issues and documenting how many articles—as determined by the title and abstract—explicitly examined the U.S. concept of race, excluding from the analysis book reviews, special issues, and editorials or editorial introductions. Simply including race as a variable in a study did not warrant inclusion; race had to be explicitly highlighted in the title/purpose of the study (e.g., the experiences of African American students at a liberal arts college). In one case we were unable to locate the articles for an issue. However, we contacted the editor and successfully retrieved data about the articles published in that issue. The data were analyzed by calculating the percentage of articles published on race for each journal over the three-year timeframe, dividing the number of articles published on race by the total number of articles. Finally, the journals were ranked according to their percentages and data were utilized to draw inferences about findings using a CRT lens.

Some limitations of this study should be addressed before describing the results. First, the study was limited to journals included in Bray and Major's (2011) study. Given this fact, there were several journals that might have warranted inclusion (e.g., *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*), but were excluded since Bray and Major's study was used to determine the sample. Second, some journals in the sample are generally focused (e.g., *Journal of Higher Education*), while others are specialized (e.g., *Journal of the Professoriate*) or international in scope (e.g., *Quality in Higher Education*). Thus, some journals might cover topics of race more than others. Third, the study covered a three-year period, which means that journals might show different indicators over a longer or shorter period of time. In spite of these limitations, we believe the findings of this study will be useful for faculty and scholars who publish on race within higher education contexts and will enhance conversations about journal rankings and the inclusivity of studies regarding race in journals within the field of higher education.

Results

According to Bray and Major's 2011 study, six journals are placed in the top tier, comprising those higher education journals with the highest level of prestige (see Table 1). In 2010, there were 314 articles published in those six journals; however, just 25 of them explored race (see Table 4). In 2011, 23 of 319 articles explored race; in 2012, 17 articles of 330 explored race. In total, over the three-year period, the six tier-1 journals published 963 articles, with 65 or

6.75% of the articles focusing on race. Examining the tier-1 journals individually, the percentages of articles published on race during the three years ranged from as low as 1% to as high as 20.95%. Among the tier-1 journals, the *Journal of College Student Development* published the highest percentage (20.95%) of articles on race; this was also the highest percentage of any journal within the study.

Fourteen journals were considered to be tier-2 in the Bray and Major 2011 study. However, our sample consisted of 10 of those journals as we removed themed journals and monographs from our analysis (see Table 2). In 2010, there were 293 articles published among the 10 journals, with eight of those articles focusing on race (see Table 4). In 2011, the total percentage of articles highlighting race increased from 2.73% to 3.6%. Finally, in 2012, the percentage decreased slightly to 3.47%. Collectively, over the three-year period, the tier-2 journals published 888 articles, with 29 or 3.27% of the articles exploring race. Within tier-2 journals, the percentages of articles published on race by individual journals over the three years ranged from as low as 0% to as high as 15.38%. The tier-2 journal that published the greatest percentage of articles focusing on race was the *Journal of College Counseling*, which published 15.38% of its articles on race over the three-year timeframe.

Finally, our sample included 26 of 30 tier-3 journals included in Bray and Major's (2011) study (see Table 3). In 2010, there were 583 articles published among the 26 journals; however, just 15 of those articles explored race (see Table 4). In 2011, there were 634 articles published, with 15 exploring race; in 2012, publications on race increased to 22 articles published out of 595. Collectively, these journals published 1,812 articles and 52 (2.87%) of those articles focused on race. Within the tier-3 journals, the percentages of articles published on race by individual journals over the three years ranged from as low as 0% to as high as 18.42%. In fact, 13 of the journals within this group did not publish any articles that explicitly highlighted race during the three years. The *Journal of the Professoriate* published the greatest percentage (18.42%) of articles on race within this tier.

Overall, of the 42 publications included in the present study, percentages of studies published on race ranged from as low as 0% to as high as 20.95%, with 14 of the journals not publishing on race at all. In addition, we noted that more prestigious journals—as indicated by Bray and Major's (2011) study—dedicated the most attention to race. For instance, there were six tier-1 journals, which published 65 articles on race, in comparison to the 10 tier-2 journals and 26 tier-3 journals that published 29 and 52 articles on race, respectively. In addition, by rearranging in tiers the journals included in this analysis based on the percentage of race-related articles published over the three-year timeframe, there is a clear distinction between those journals that are ranked “top tier mentions” (see Table 5) and “secondary tier mentions” (see Table 6). Top tier mentions published 14% or more of their articles on race, while secondary tier mentions published 6-8%.

Table 4
Number of Articles Published, by Tier

		Total Published	Race/Ethnicity Studies
2010			
	Tier 1	314	25 (7.96%)
	Tier 2	293	8 (2.73%)
	Tier 3	583	15 (2.57%)
2011			
	Tier 1	319	23 (7.21%)
	Tier 2	278	10 (3.60%)
	Tier 3	634	15 (2.37%)
2012			
	Tier 1	330	17 (5.15%)
	Tier 2	317	11 (3.47%)
	Tier 3	595	22 (3.70%)
Total			
	Tier 1	963	65 (6.75%)
	Tier 2	888	29 (3.27%)
	Tier 3	1,812	52 (2.87%)

Table 5

Top Tier Mentions of Race Journals in the Field of Higher Education

College Student Affairs Journal
Journal of College Counseling
Journal of College Student Development
Journal of Higher Education
Journal of the Professoriate

Note. Ranged from 14-21%.

Table 6

Secondary Tier Mentions of Race Journals in the Field of Higher Education

Community College Journal of Research & Practice
Higher Education Policy
Journal of Applied Research in the Community College
Journal of College Orientation and Transition
NASPA Journal
Review of Higher Education

Note. Ranged from 6-8%.

Discussion and Conclusion

Within the present study we sought to document the prevalence of race-related scholarship in journals in the field of higher education. We found that the journals included in the study published from as low as 0% to as high as 20.95% of articles on race-related topic within a three-year timeframe. While we argue 0% is unacceptable, we do acknowledge that some journals' specificity might limit the inclusion of articles exploring topics related to race. For example, journals with an international focus (e.g., *Quality in Higher Education*) might not be expected to include many articles on the U.S. concept of race. In addition, journals or monographs that publish thematic issues (e.g., *New Directions* monographs) might intentionally or unintentionally include or exclude race-related articles.

The *Journal of College Student Development* published the most articles exploring race within the three-year timeframe, totaling 20.95%. Since this was the highest percentage for journals included within the study, perhaps 21% can serve as a benchmark for journals that strive to be inclusive of studies explicitly exploring race. In addition, the *Journal of College Student Development* was considered a tier-1 journal within Bray and Major's (2011) study. Thus, race-related studies published in the *Journal of College Student Development* might have received more attention from readers within the field of higher education, especially given its wide readership. Nevertheless, the manuscript acceptance rate for the *Journal of College Student Development* is 7-9%, which means it is difficult to gain entry into the journal even though it appears to be welcoming to articles concerned with race (American College Personnel Association, n.d.). Given these dynamics, or more generally those of any journal, scholars who publish on race need to take into account the prevalence of race-related scholarship in a journal, the manuscript acceptance rate of the journal, and the impact/readership of the journal when preparing articles for peer review.

Finally, we acknowledge that specific journals within the field of higher education that focus on race (e.g., *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*) or issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion within higher education contexts (e.g., *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*) were excluded from the present study. While these journals were excluded, they should be recognized as journals where scholars who conduct race-related scholarship can submit their work. We also acknowledge that several journals entertained or have published special themed issues regarding race (e.g., *New Directions* monographs, *Review of Higher Education*) and these are outlets for scholars as well.

We believe that the present study will be useful for scholars, critical race scholars, and tenure-track faculty who often publish on race. Perhaps this study can be useful as supporting documentation in preparing tenure dossiers—highlighting which journals in the field of higher education tend to publish more race-related studies and documenting why scholars who often publish on race might choose certain journals—regardless of tier—or journals beyond the field of higher education to publish their work. In addition, similar analyses might be helpful in relation to other topics (e.g., gender studies, sexuality studies, disability studies). For example, Peña (2014) recently published “Marginalization of Published Scholarship on Students with

Disabilities in Higher Education Journals” in the *Journal of College Student Development*. A future practice might include developing impact factors within a field by subtopic (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation within higher education contexts) rather than broader fields. This could be done not just to document a journal’s status or prestige, but to determine reader accessibility.

Most importantly, we hope that the findings within the present study highlight the need for journals to become more inclusive of race-related articles and for future research into why scholarship related to race is often limited within journals in the field of higher education. Scholars cannot conduct the important and necessary critical race scholarship Bensimon and Bishop (2012) and Harper (2012) have called for when racial explorations are simply absent from journals’ archives.

Note

Within this article, the term race encompasses both race and ethnicity.

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